AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

The following listing of claims supersedes all prior versions and listings of claims in this application:

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1. (Currently Amended) Apparatus for supporting ~~negotiations~~ a negotiation process, said apparatus comprising a [[group]] plurality of computer-based agents, each agent including at least one CPU connected to memory and at least one input/output port for connection with a communications network permitting electronic communication between agents ~~agent means~~, wherein at least one of the agents [[means]] comprises:

means for ~~initiating~~ generating instructions for the conduct of interactions between itself and other agents ~~the agent means~~, and

means for defining the negotiation process in terms of a plurality of phases of the negotiation process during each of which particular parts of the negotiation are completed[[,]] such that the responses to requests in an earlier phase in the process constrain [[the]] responses generated in subsequent phases, and

wherein each agent [[means]] has means for responding to the instructions to dynamically negotiate ~~negotiating~~ an agreement in accordance with the said defined negotiation process ~~definition~~.

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2. (Currently Amended) Apparatus according to claim 1 <u>arranged</u> such that the [[space]] <u>range</u> of options for decisions <u>that each agent has to make</u> during each phase of the negotiation ~~that each agent has to make~~ is constrained relative to the possible states of the overall negotiation.

3. (Currently Amended) Apparatus according to claim 1, comprising<u>:</u>

means for [[the]] generation of a description of the interactions required in a negotiation, and the purpose of each interaction, and means for the retrieval from a store of a process that can act on these descriptions.

4. (Currently Amended) A method for performing <u>computer-based</u> negotiations<u>,</u> <u>said method comprising:</u>

using a plurality of computer-based agent<u>s, each agent including at least one</u> <u>CPU connected to memory and at least one input/output port for connection to a</u> <u>communications network permitting electronic communication between agents</u> [[means]], wherein one of the agent<u>s generates</u> ~~means initiates~~ interactions between <u>itself and other</u> the agent<u>s</u> [[means]], the agent<u>s respond to said instructions by</u> [[means]] dynamically ~~negotiate~~ <u>negotiating</u> an agreement <u>in accordance with the</u> <u>process defined in the instructions</u>, [[and]] the negotiation process <u>comprising</u> ~~is defined~~ ~~in terms of~~ a plurality of phases during <u>each of</u> which particular parts of the negotiation

5. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 4 in which the availability of options for decisions during each phase of the negotiation is constrained relative to the possible states of the overall negotiation.

6. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 4, comprising the phases of:

generation <u>by one of the agents</u> of a description of the interactions required in a negotiation, and the purpose of each interaction, and

retrieval <u>by at least one of the agents</u> from a store of [[a]] process <u>data</u> that [[can]] <u>causes the agents to</u> act <u>according to the required</u> ~~on these~~ descriptions.

7. (Currently Amended) A <u>computer-readable memory medium containing executable</u> computer program ~~or suite of computer programs for use with one or more computers comprising a set of instructions to carry out~~ <u>which, when executed on at least one computer, effects</u> the method as set out in claim 4.